



Beach Monitoring

Fact Sheet

This program is 100% funded by federal grant funds, which are allocated by the U.S. Congress. However, should Congress increase its support, the Beach Monitoring Program would likely place the increase into laboratory methodology not currently being performed to determine the host(s) of the enterococci and/or fecal coliform. Should Congress decrease the current level of funding, then options could be:

1.) Reducing the number of beach sites in the program, 2.) Reducing the sampling frequency of beach sites in the program, and 3) Eliminating the public outreach projects.

Objective

The primary objective of the OPH Beach Monitoring Program is to provide timely notifications and advisories of coastal beach recreational water quality to the general public. This primary objective achieves a high level of transparency, accountability, and effectiveness for our state government by making responsible use of federal grant money to help safeguard the public health.

Performance Indicators

- Percentage of sites sampled annually

Narrative

The Beach Program was initiated by the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in 1997 in response to the growing concern about public health risks posed by polluted bathing beaches. With the passage of the BEACH (Beaches Environmental Assessment and Coastal Health) Act on October 10, 2000, pathogens and their indicators were given national attention

by establishing criteria for states to operate monitoring and notification programs. Each week during the swim season, agencies, groups, and contracted individuals collect beach water samples, provide analysis and data, compile results, and make them available to the public by means of a program website, radio and print media interviews and press releases, and the posting of advisory signage at the designated sample points. Additionally, the Beach Program performs several public outreach projects each year.

Better Health

How This Activity Advances the State Outcome Goal

The OPH Beach Monitoring Program is a model of transparency and accountability. The program adheres to EPA-approved quality control measures without exception. These quality control procedures and safeguards are contained in the Quality Management Plan and the Quality Assurance Project Plans, respectively; the latter is annually reviewed and updated as needed. Furthermore, as part of the program's commitment to EPA an annual report is produced and made available for public comment. The data quality measures, notification procedures, and all relevant statistical analyses are made available for review, and even after finalization they remain accessible through the program's website.

Each year the Office of Public Health receives approximately \$320k in federal grant funds to operate the Beach Monitoring Program. The population of the Louisiana coastal parishes is 1,559,665 (U.S. Census Bureau. March 2, 2009. State & County QuickFacts: Louisiana. <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states.22000.html>). These figures translate into an annual expenditure of **only \$0.21** per person! Surely such a modest fiscal outlay for safeguarding public health would be hard to match in any other public health endeavor.

As of this writing, 516 beach water samples have been taken and analyzed during the 2009 swim season. Two-hundred eighty-five samples were out of compliance. Thus, without the Beach Monitoring Program, beachgoers would have engaged in recreational activities this season 55.2% of the time when the water quality was under advisory status. It is difficult to quantify the numbers of gastrointestinal illnesses which were *not* contracted from contaminated beach water, or the number of potentially serious skin infections which did *not* occur. One cannot but guess at the number of days of work or school which were *not* missed. All in all, the Beach Monitoring Program is an appropriate and effective use of federal grant funds to protect the public health, provide useful environmental data, and to help in managing Louisiana's coastal protection and restoration programs.